



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, June 8, 2000

RSPA 15-00
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**U.S. Department of Transportation Forms
Partnership with Washington State
To Participate in Interstate Pipeline Inspections**

U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater today joined with Washington Governor Gary Locke and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray to announce a partnership between Washington state and U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety that will allow Washington state pipeline safety inspectors to participate in inspections of interstate pipeline facilities.

"I am pleased to announce with Governor Locke and Senator Murray a partnership between Washington and the USDOT Office of Pipeline Safety," Secretary Slater said. "I commend them for their continued efforts to ensure the safety of the people and the environment along the pipelines. This agreement highlights all of our continued efforts to ensure the safety of the people and environment along pipelines."

Today's agreement will increase the participation of Washington state pipeline safety inspectors in damage prevention, construction, accident investigations, emergency response coordination, and other forms of inspection.

Since the tragic pipeline failure in Bellingham, Wash., in June 1999, the Department has been working closely with Governor Locke, Senator Murray and other officials in Washington to respond to their concerns about pipeline safety. Last week, the Department announced that it is seeking a \$3.05 million civil penalty against Olympic Pipeline, owned and operated by Equilon, for safety violations related to the June 1999 pipeline failure in Bellingham. That is the largest civil penalty ever proposed against a pipeline operator in the history of the federal pipeline safety program and reflects the serious attention the U.S. Department of Transportation is paying to this.

The partnership agreement mirrors provisions in the Administration bill, the Pipeline Safety and Community Protection Act of 2000 (S. 2409/H.R. 4276). The Administration's proposed legislation will strengthen state partnerships with USDOT and allow states to monitor new construction, investigate accidents and participate in local preparedness and damage prevention activities.

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Under the proposed legislation, USDOT would be authorized to reimburse up to 100 percent of a state's costs in monitoring new pipeline construction or investigating accidents. The proposed legislation is scheduled for Senate Commerce Committee action next week. The legislation also would increase the public's right to know, making public information about the safety of pipelines and the steps pipeline companies are taking to protect people and the environment.

"This legislation presents us the opportunity to enact the most comprehensive pipeline safety legislation in our nation's history," Secretary Slater said. "Today I join Governor Locke and Senator Murray in calling on Congress to enact legislation to strengthen our pipeline safety program to better protect people and the environment from the threats posed by pipelines."

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